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ABSTRACT

This booklet is designed to introduce aspects of effective reading instruction that should be considered when teaching reading to students with disabilities. An introduction discusses general principles for teaching reading to students with disabilities and emphasizes the importance of individually designing a program based on a student's strengths and needs, parent involvement, and academic modifications. The following information is organized into seven chapters, each of which describes essential skill building and teaching activities: (1) phonological awareness; (2) systematic phonics instruction; (3) word identification; (4) supported passage reading; (5) fluent reading; (6) reading comprehension; and (7) early intervention in reading. The chapters are organized into the following sections: what it is, why it is important, what parents can do, what teachers can do, information for second language learners, and references. Methods of teaching reading to students with disabilities described in the booklet have been shown to be particularly effective. Some of these methods are used in regular education classrooms for students who are just learning to read, but they are appropriate and useful for students with disabilities of any age who have not learned to read well. (CR)

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PEER PROJECT LITERACY SERIES

ED 454 627

Teaching Students with Disabilities to Read

by Carolyn A. Denton
Jan E. Hasbrouck
Texas A&M University

Prepared by
the PEER Project
(Parents Engaged in Education Reform)

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PARENTS ENGAGED IN EDUCATION REFORM

Teaching Students with Disabilities to Read

by
Carolyn A. Denton and Jan E. Hasbrouck
Texas A&M University

September 2000

Prepared by the PEER Project
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the Federation for Children with Special Needs
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Parents Engaged in Education Reform (PEER) is a national technical assistance project funded by the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs. PEER's purpose is to support parents of children with disabilities and their organizations to be informed, active participants in education reform efforts. In addition, to enhance opportunities for early literacy in reading for at-risk students, PEER is providing information and training to parent and community organizations in promising and best practices in literacy.

The Federation for Children with Special Needs is a nonprofit organization based on the philosophy of parents helping parents. Founded in 1974 as a coalition of twelve disability and parent organizations, today the Federation is an independent advocacy organization committed to quality education and health care for all, and to protecting the rights of all children. To this end, the Federation provides information, support, and assistance to parents of children with disabilities, their organizations, their professional partners, and their communities.

For more information about the PEER Project or the Federation for Children with Special Needs, please contact the Federation's Central Office at:

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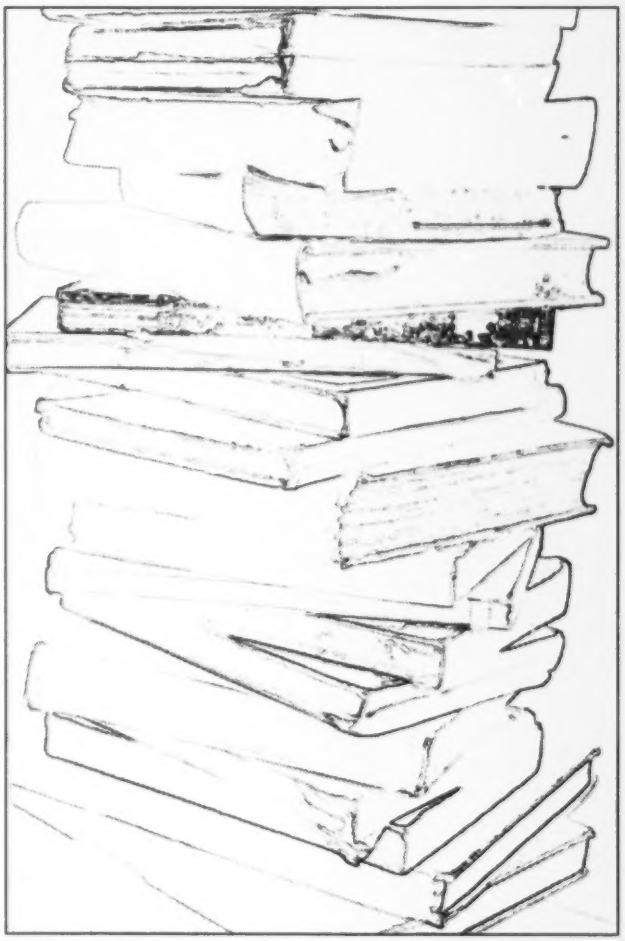
Teaching Students with Disabilities to Read

Reading is very important for success in our society, yet as many as one in five students has difficulty learning to read. Most students with learning disabilities, and many students with other types of disabilities, have problems in the areas of reading, writing, and spelling. This PEER Resource Booklet introduces parents and teachers to aspects of effective reading instruction that should be considered when teaching reading to students with disabilities. The Booklet is organized into the following seven chapters, each of which describes essential skill-building and teaching activities:

- **Phonological Awareness**
- **Systematic Phonics Instruction**
- **Word Identification**
- **Supported Passage Reading**
- **Fluent Reading**
- **Reading Comprehension**
- **Early Intervention in Reading**

The chapters are organized into the following sections:

- What is it?
- Why is it important?
- What can parents do? [Activities also appropriate for use by reading tutors.]
- What can teachers do?
- Note for second language learners (in chapters on Phonological Awareness, Fluent Reading, and Early Intervention in Reading Resources)
- References



Methods of teaching reading to students with disabilities described in this paper have been shown to be particularly effective. Some of these methods are used in regular education classrooms for students who are just learning to read (Kindergarten through Grade 2), but they are appropriate and useful for students with disabilities of any age who have not learned to read well.

General Principles to Keep in Mind

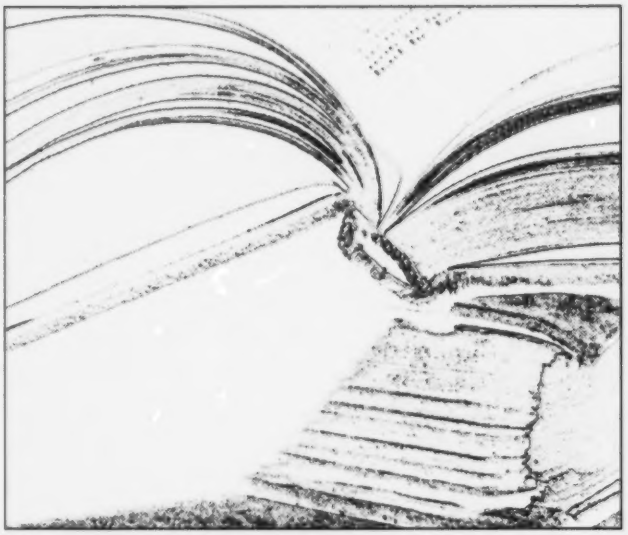
This section describes some key issues in reading instruction for students with disabilities. These issues are important, regardless of the age or ability level of a student.

- Students with all types of disabilities have the right to quality reading instruction, whether they are in elementary, middle, or high school. Parents have the right to insist that the school provide instruction designed to help their children with disabilities improve their reading skills. These issues should be addressed in a student's Individualized Education Program (IEP).

- Reading programs for students with disabilities must be individually designed based on a student's strengths and needs. Parents and teachers should not make judgments about a student's ability to learn, or about the best way to teach him or her, based solely on a student's disabling condition or label. Every individual student's abilities, needs, and life situation must be carefully evaluated and considered in the IEP in order to design the best reading program for that student.

- Many students with disabilities may need modifications (changes) in the way they receive instruction, and in the way they fulfill class requirements in order to succeed in areas such as science, social studies, and language arts. These modifications are very important, but they should not take the place of instruction designed to help students with disabilities improve their reading skills.

- Parents should, first and always, communicate with their child's teacher(s). Parents can simply ask their child's teacher(s) what can be done to help the child at home. Parents are also important sources of information about their child's interests, abilities, and effective teaching strategies. Coordination of school and home efforts is one of the best ways to help a student succeed. Strategies to ensure communication and coordination between school and home can be addressed in the student's IEP.



Students with all types of disabilities have the *right* to quality reading instruction, whether they are in elementary, middle, or high school.

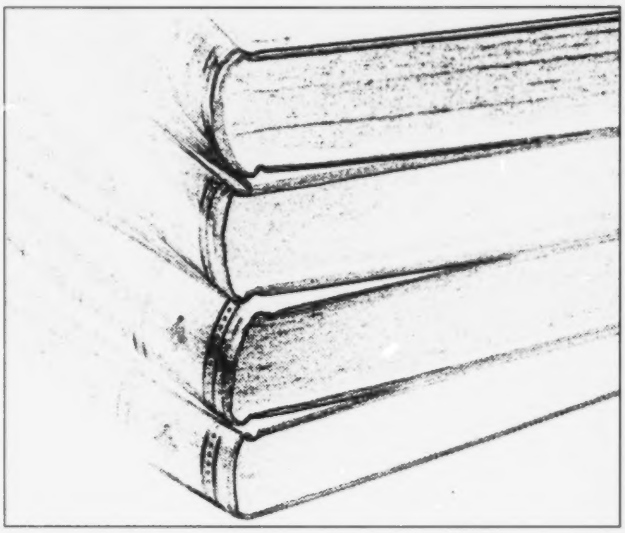
- The reading material used in reading instruction has to be "not too hard, not too easy," but at the right level for a student. Actual reading

of real stories or other material should be part of a student's reading program.

- In the past, some people believed that certain methods of teaching reading were best for students with certain disabilities: that some methods were best for students with brain injury, that others were better for students with learning disabilities, and that still other methods were best for students with mental retardation. This is not the case. The success of a method of teaching reading depends on the content of the program, the way it is taught, the intensity of the instruction (how often and how actively it is taught), and the needs and strengths of the individual student.

- Although different methods of teaching reading may work equally well with students having various disabilities, students benefit from instruction which is systematic and structured. Reading skills should be introduced in careful order, and students must be given a great deal of practice and repetition in each skill, so that they master each skill before new ones are introduced.

- **Note for Second Language Learners:** Students who come to school unable to speak English should first be taught to read in their native language. Later, as they gain proficiency in spoken English they should be taught to extend these skills to reading in English. This practice, however, is not possible in all school situations. Instructional materials may not be available in the child's native language, or there may not be a teacher who can speak and read in the child's native language. If students cannot speak English, and they cannot be taught to read in their native language, they should be given time to develop their proficiency in spoken English before they begin reading instruction. They need to learn English speech sounds and vocabulary. English reading instruction should begin after the student can speak English well enough to benefit from instruction.



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Snow, C.E., Burns, M.S., & Griffin, P. (Eds.) (1998). *Preventing Reading Difficulties in Young Children.* Washington D.C.: National Academy Press.

Chapter 1: Phonological Awareness

What is it?

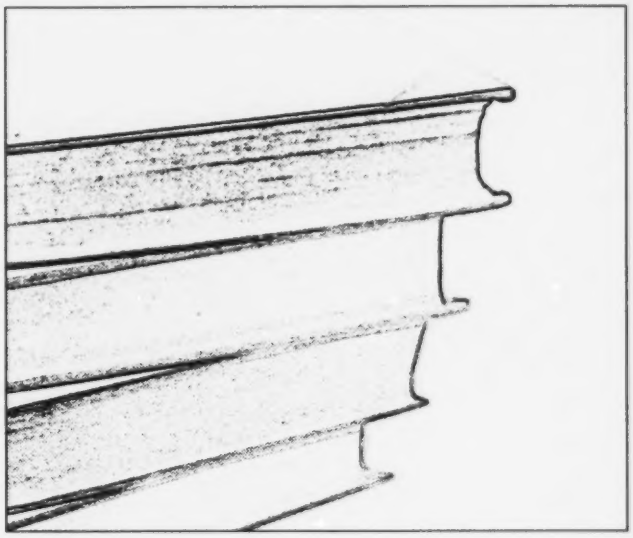
Phonological awareness is the ability to hear separate words, syllables, and sounds in speech. This awareness allows a student to separate spoken words into their sounds and put sounds together to make words. Phonological awareness is not reading; it is sensitivity to sounds in speech. It is the ability to "play with" spoken words and sounds. Another term often used in the same way is "phonemic awareness."

A person with good phonological awareness can:

1. give words that rhyme with other words,
2. clap the syllables in a word,
3. take words apart and say or identify the first sound in a word separately from the rest of the word (example: say "p-art, part"),
4. say or indicate all the sounds of a word separately (example: say "c-a-t, cat"),
5. blend sounds together to make words (like sounding out words),
6. take a sound off of a word (example: say "meat" without the "m":"eat"),
7. group words together that start with the same sound, or end with the same sound (example: snake, sad, sack; or rat, great, set), and change words in other ways.

Why is it important?

Research has shown that there is a powerful connection between the ability to *hear* and play with sounds in words and the ability to read and understand written words. It has been shown that students with good phonological awareness skills are more



likely to learn to read well. Many students have disabilities which impact the ability to read. These students frequently exhibit poor phonological awareness as a result of their disability. The good news is that these skills can be learned. Students of all ages can be taught to improve their phonological awareness skills.

What can parents do?

- Ask your child's teachers whether they have tested your child's phonological awareness. Ask whether they are providing a reading program that includes phonological awareness training.

- Read to your child. Try to find books with rhyming words and word plays. Talk about the words that rhyme. A list of good books is in an article by Yopp (p. 217) in the book Teaching Struggling Readers (see References, below).

- Teach your child poems, nursery rhymes, and/or songs. Talk about the words in the songs that rhyme.

- Play "word games" with your child. For example, try to say a list of words that rhyme with each other. (What rhymes with cat?: cat, hat, mat....) Use children's names to create lists of rhyming words, both real and "made-up." (Mark, shark, dark, lark, yark, zark.) Or, say a list of rhyming words, but include one word that does not rhyme. Have your child pick out the one that does not rhyme.

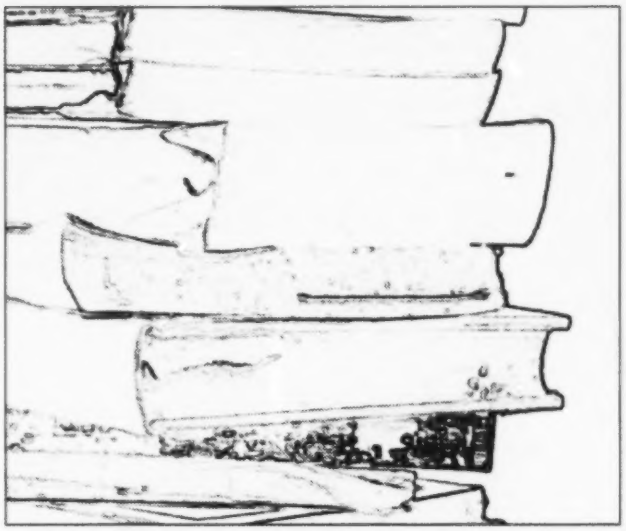
- Have your child clap for each word in a sentence, or take a step for each word. Clap for each word in a nursery rhyme or poem. (Purpose: to hear and identify words within a sentence.)

- Have your child clap the syllables in words. A good place to start is to have them clap their names, and the names of friends and relatives. John has one clap, Mary has two claps, and Maria has three claps. (Purpose: to hear the parts of words.)

What can teachers do?

Teachers can assess (test) students to find out whether they need phonological awareness training. Some tests are listed in the Resources section at the end of the chapter.

Teachers can include phonological awareness training in a student's reading program if they need it. They can include any of the activities listed above in "What can parents do?" Many published reading programs include phonological awareness training, and teachers can include additional activities for this purpose (see Resources). The following activities are very important to include in reading programs for students at risk and



Phonological awareness is not reading; it is sensitivity to sounds in speech. It is the ability to "play with" spoken words and sounds.

for students with disabilities which impact the ability to read:

- Teach students the sounds of letters. Have students blend sounds together to make words.

- "Rubber-band" words: Say words in a smooth, slow, stretched-out way and have students identify the word you are saying.

- Say words one sound at a time and have students put the sounds together and tell you the words.

Special Note for Second Language Learners

There is some question about whether or not students who are limited in English can use phonological awareness and phonemic awareness tests. They may not be able to understand the directions, and speech sounds that are common in English may not exist in the child's native language. We do not know of a test of phonological awareness in Spanish, although some researchers are working to develop this type of test.

Resources

NOTE: These resources may be helpful to teachers and parents. They are listed here merely as options. The authors of this paper do not recommend any particular program, materials, or test.

Tests of Phonological Awareness

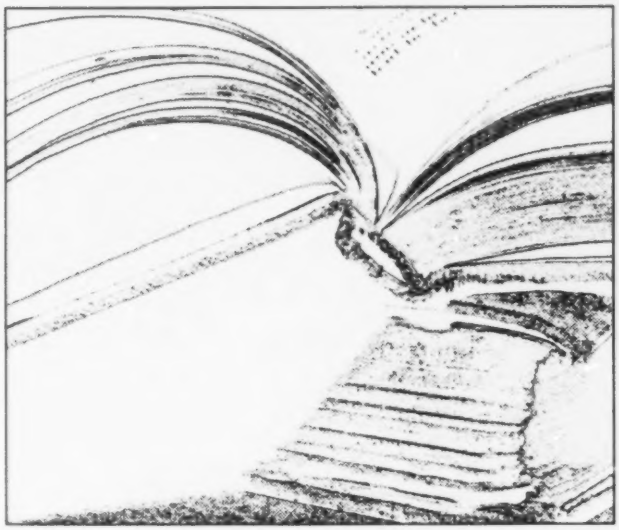
The Auditory Analysis Test, by Rosner & Simon, described in: Rosner, J., & Simon, D.P. (1971). The Auditory Analysis Test: An Initial Report. *Journal of Learning Disabilities,* 4 (7), pp. 41- 48. (May be used with students in Kindergarten through Grade 6.)

Lindamood Auditory Conceptualization Test, distributed by Pro-Ed, (800) 897-3202.

The Phonological Awareness Test, published by LinguiSystems, (800) 776-4332.

Test of Phonological Awareness, by Torgesen and Bryant, distributed by Pro-Ed, (800) 897-3202. (For younger children.)

Comprehensive Test of Phonological Processing, by Wagner, Torgesen, and Rashotte, distributed by Pro-Ed, (800) 897-3202. (For kindergarten through college-age students.)



The Yopp-Singer Test of Phoneme Segmentation, described in: Yopp, H.K. (1995). A Test for Assessing Phonemic Awareness in Young Children. *The Reading Teacher,* 49 (1), pp. 20-29.

Reading Programs that Include Phonological and Phonemic Awareness

Open Court Phonemic Awareness and Phonics Kit, Open Court Publishing Co., 315 5th St., Peru, IL 61354, (800) 435-6850. Published by SRA, (800) 843-8855.

Read Well: Critical Foundations in Primary Reading, by Sprick, Howard, and Fidanque. Published by Sopris West, (800) 547-6747.

Saxon Phonics, Kindergarten level, (800) 284-7019.

Books and Special Programs with Phonological Awareness Activities

Lindamood Phoneme Sequencing Program for Reading, Spelling, and Speech (formerly Auditory Discrimination in Depth), published by Pro-Ed, (800) 897-3202.

Phonemic Awareness in Young Children: A Classroom Curriculum, by Marilyn J. Adams, Barbara Foorman, Ingvar Lundberg, and Terri Beeler, published in 1998 by Paul Brookes, PO Box 10624, Baltimore, MD 21285-0624, (410)-337-9580.

Phonemic Awareness: Playing with Sounds to Strengthen Beginning Reading Skills, published by Creative Teaching Press, (800) 287-8879.

The Phonological Awareness Kit and The Sounds Abound Program, published by LinguiSystems, (800) 776-4332.

Phonological Awareness Training for Reading, by Torgesen and Bryant, published by Pro-Ed, (800) 897-3202.

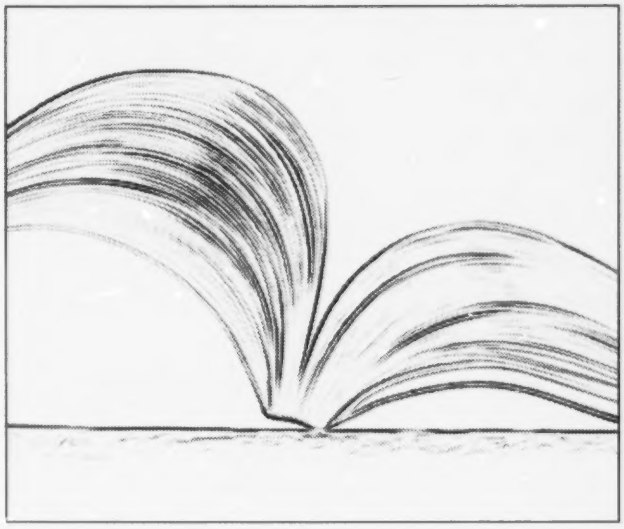
Sounds and Letters for Readers and Spellers, published by Sopris West, (800) 547-6747.

Companies that Sell Items for Use in Phonemic Awareness Training (Call for catalogs.)

LinguiSystems, (800) 776-4332.

Pro-Ed, (800) 897-3202.

The Reading Manipulatives Company, (888) 997-2448.



Teaching Resource Center, (800) 833-3389.

Resources for Reading, (800) ART-READ (278-7323).

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Griffith, P.L. & Olson, M.W. (1992). Phonemic Awareness Helps Beginning Readers Break the Code. *Reading Teacher,* 45 (7), pp. 516-523.

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Spector, J.E. (1995). Phonemic Awareness Training: Application of Principles of Direct Instruction. *Reading & Writing Quarterly: Overcoming Learning Difficulties,* 11, pp. 37-51.

Sprick, M. (1997). *Strategies for Teaching Phonemic Awareness,* published by Teaching Strategies, Inc., Eugene, OR.

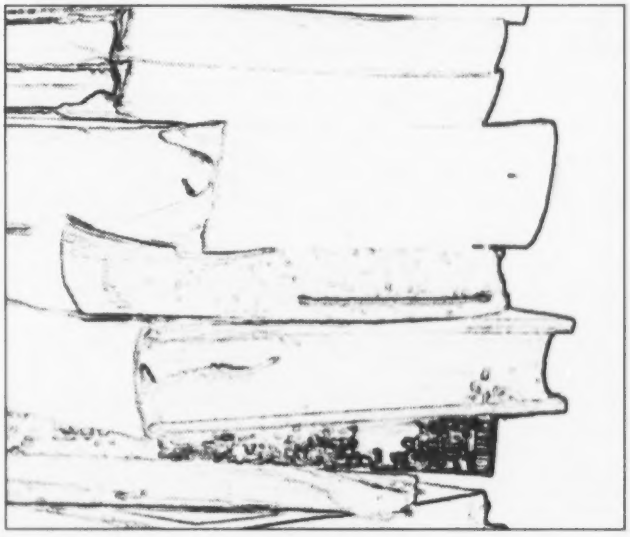
Yopp, H.K. (1992). Developing Phonemic Awareness in Young Children. *Reading Teacher,* 45 (9), pp. 696-703.

Yopp, H.K. (1998). Read-Aloud Books for Developing Phonemic Awareness: An Annotated Bibliography. In R. L. Allington (ed.), *Teaching Struggling Readers: Articles From the Reading Teacher.* Newark, DE: International Reading Association, pp. 217-225.

Chapter 2: Systematic Phonics Instruction

What is it?

Phonics instruction means teaching students how to use the sounds of letters and letter groups to read words they do not know. It means teaching the sounds of the letters and letter groups in order, and teaching how to use these sounds to read words. *Systematic* phonics instruction means teaching these things in a deliberate, organized way.



The success of phonics instruction depends in part on the student's level of phonological and phonemic awareness (see Chapter 1: **Phonological Awareness**). Students must become aware that speech is made up of separate sounds. Good phonics instruction includes activities designed to increase students' phonological awareness. Students must also understand the *alphabetic principle* that letters in words stand for certain sounds. Students must be able to recognize letters quickly and give their sounds. Although students can read without knowing the names of the letters, it is helpful for them to know letter names. Once they know some letters and sounds, students learn to use this knowledge to read words. They may "sound out" words by saying the sounds in them slowly and smoothly (saying "mmmaaattt—mat"), or they may say larger parts of words which are represented by groups of letters (saying "m—at, mat"). Parents and teachers should prompt students who are unable to speak to sound it out "in your head."

Good phonics instruction for students with disabilities should be clear and direct. It should be done every day. It should not be the student's entire reading program, but only a part of the reading program.

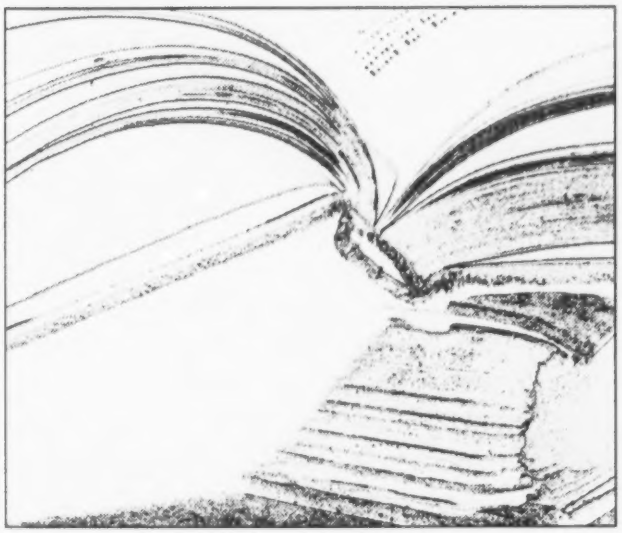
Good phonics instruction for students with disabilities should be clear and direct. It should be done every day. It should not be the student's entire reading program, but only a part of the reading program. It should focus on reading words. The goal of good phonics instruction is to enable students to read words quickly and automatically. It must allow the students to practice the skills they are learning by reading stories or articles. Students should spend from

20 to 30 minutes each day *actually reading* (see Chapter 4: **Supported Passage Reading**).

There are several different methods of teaching phonics in schools. In some methods, students are taught phonetic patterns only as they need them in their reading and writing. In other methods, students are purposefully and directly taught the skills needed to use phonics to read words. In reading tutoring programs, such as the *Reading Recovery* program (see Chapter 7: **Early Intervention in Reading**), which are totally individualized (tutoring provided one-on-one) and which are taught by well-trained teachers, teaching phonics as it is needed by the student while s/he is reading and writing can be effective. Usually, though, more systematic and direct methods have been found to be the most successful for students with disabilities.

One type of reading method which includes systematic phonics instruction is called Direct Instruction. Some examples of Direct Instruction reading programs are *Reading Mastery* and *Corrective Reading* (see References). In these methods, students learn easier skills before harder ones. They learn each letter's sound by itself and then learn to blend the sounds to read words. Students receive a lot of practice in the skills they are learning, and they receive immediate feedback from the teacher about their reading. These methods have been effective in teaching many students with disabilities to read.

Other methods often used with students with disabilities are based on the *Orton-Gillingham* approach to teaching reading and spelling. Some examples are the *Alphabetic Phonics* program and the *Slingerland* method. In these approaches, students learn letters and sounds through movement, speech, writing, and looking. For example, when a student learns a letter,



Some computer programs can help students practice their phonics skills, but they should not take the place of good phonics instruction.

he/she might trace the letter while saying its name and sound, write the letter in the air, then write it on paper and use the letter to read words and sentences.

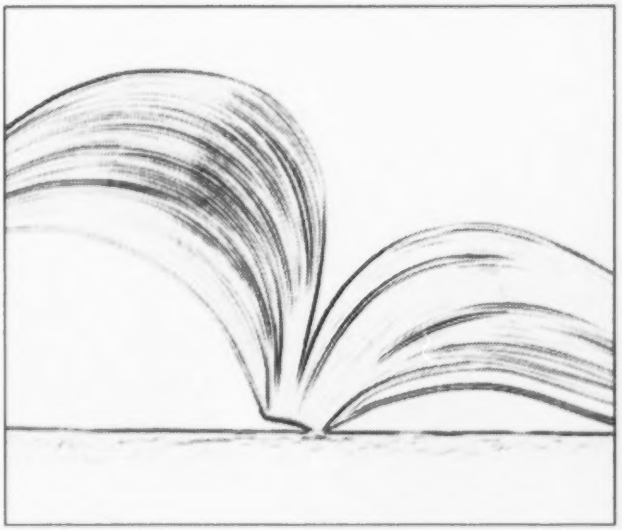
Another way of teaching phonics that has been successful for students with disabilities is one in which students learn to read words they do not know by using word or word parts they *do* know. For example, if students know how to read "slide" and "nice," they can use this knowledge to help

them read the word "slice." This method is used in *Reading Recovery* (see Chapter 7: **Early Intervention**) and in the *Benchmark Word Identification Program.* In the *Benchmark* program, students learn a list of 120 key words which have common letter patterns. They learn 5 or 6 new words each week, and they are taught how to use the sounds in these words to read words they do not know.

One method of teaching the sounds of letters to students with significant disabilities or delays is to combine the letter with a picture that represents the sound of the letter. A commercial program which uses this approach is *Open Court* (see Resources). Students with significant cognitive delays have also learned to read using the *Distar Reading Program,* now sold under the name *Reading Mastery* (see Resources), a method which breaks reading down into several skills and teaches each skill in a careful sequence. Other reading methods which teach skills in this way are included in the Resources section, at the end of the chapter.

Some computer programs can help students practice their phonics skills, but they should not take the place of good phonics instruction. Two approaches to teaching phonics which are not effective for students with disabilities are memorizing a lot of phonics rules and doing a lot of worksheets.

In one study by Heimann and others (see References), students with autism increased their ability to read words, their phonological awareness, and their communication skills, through the use of an interactive computer program. The program used in this study gave feedback to the students in many ways – through voice, animation, video, and sign language. Students could read individual words, and they could create sentences with the words. Although computer-



aided instruction holds promise for students with autism and other types of disabilities, it is important to remember that a computer program alone cannot be expected to solve all reading difficulties.

Why is it important?

Most students with disabilities who have reading problems have difficulty with phonemic awareness and phonics. Phonemic awareness training, as described above, and systematic phonics instruction, are two aspects of reading instruction which have been most successful for students with disabilities. For many students who are poor readers, particularly those with learning disabilities and/or dyslexia, systematic phonics instruction is important simply because it works.

What can parents do?

- Ask your child's teacher whether systematic phonics instruction is included in your child's educational program. Ask whether your child is receiving phonics instruction every day using a well-organized, clear method of teaching.

- Make sure that your child's IEP specifically addresses the need for systematic phonics instruction, if appropriate.

- If your child is in a phonics program at school, ask your teacher what you can do to help at home.

- Read A-B-C books to your child, if they are appropriate for your child's age.

- Have your child make letter books, if appropriate for the child's age. Begin with blank books with a letter on the front of each one. Help the child find or draw pictures of words that begin with that letter. Make a book for each sound the child has trouble with.

- Have your child try to say words that start with each letter of the alphabet. The child might try to think of a food that begins with "a," then one that begins with "b," etc. Even better, take turns thinking of these words with your child.

- Have your child sort picture cards or objects that begin or end with the same letter.

- When your child is trying to sound out a word, have the child say it smoothly and slowly. Do not have the child chop the word apart and say each sound one at a time (like saying "m / a / t" for "mat"). Instead, encourage the child to say the word slowly and in a smooth, connected way, so that each sound can be heard ("mmmmaaaat, mat").

- Support your child as he or she tries to use phonics to read hard words in a story. If the word appears to be one the child could sound out, tell him or her to start the word, and then say it slowly, and think about what would make sense in the story. If the word is too difficult, tell the child the word.

What can teachers do?

- Teachers can be sure to include systematic phonics instruction in the reading program of students with disabilities, when appropriate. They can make use of published programs if these are of high quality. Phonics instruction for students with disabilities should be well-planned and well-organized and should have the following characteristics:
  1. *It should proceed from easier skills to more difficult skills, ensuring that the student masters each skill as the lessons progress.*
  2. *It should include many opportunities for practice, both of isolated skills and of real reading.*
  3. *It should include immediate feedback when the student makes an error.*
  4. *It should not include large amounts of time on memorization of rules or on completion of worksheets.*

- Sounds of letters and letter groups should be taught directly. The teacher should model or demonstrate the sound, and the students should practice the sound.

- Teachers must be sure that they are pronouncing the letter sounds correctly themselves. It is very important that sounds such as /b/, /d/, and /k/ should not be pronounced with a short "u" sound after them. "B" does *not* say "bu." The habit of pronouncing letters with extra sounds can produce confusion in students.

- Teachers can be sure to teach students to sound out words in a smooth, connected way, as described above in What can parents do?

Resources

NOTE: These resources may be helpful to teachers and parents. They are listed here merely as options. The authors of this paper do not recommend any particular program, materials, or test.

Published Reading Programs Which Emphasize Systematic Phonics Instruction

Read Well: Critical Foundations in Primary Reading, by Sprick, Howard, and Fidanque. Published by Sopris West, (800) 547-6747.

Corrective Reading, by Engelmann, Haddox, Hanner, & Osborn, published by SRA, 220 East Danieldale Rd., DeSoto, TX 75115-2490, (800) 843-8855.

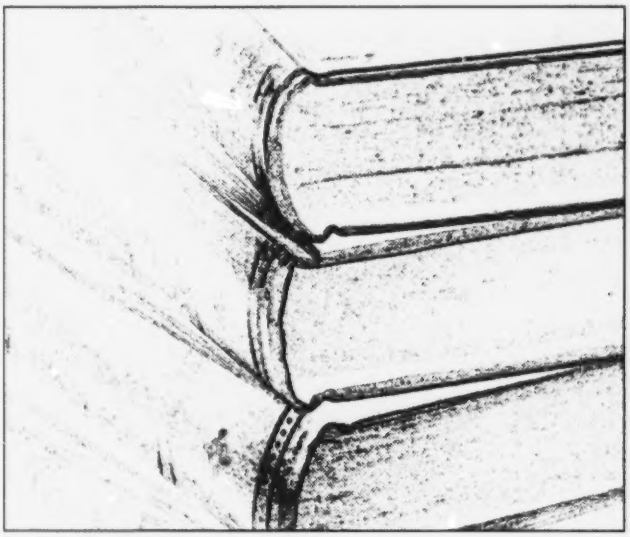
Open Court, published by SRA, 220 East Danieldale Rd., DeSoto, TX 75115-2490, (800) 843-8855.

Reading Mastery, by Engelmann & Bruner, published by SRA, 220 East Danieldale Rd., DeSoto, TX 75115-2490, (800) 843-8855.

The Slingerland Method, Educators Publishing Service, 31 Smith Place, Cambridge, MA 02138-1000, (800) 225-5750.

The Scottish Rite Method, Scottish Rite Hospital, (806) 747-3268.

Benchmark Word Identification/Vocabulary Development Program, 2107 N. Providence Rd., Media, PA 19063, (610) 565-3741; E-mail: gaskins@aol.com; www.indiana.edu/~eric_rec/ieo/bibs/benchmrk.html.



Books

Phonics They Use, (1991) by Cunningham, published by Harper, Collins, ISBN: 0-673-46433-4.

Direct Instruction Reading (3rd Edition) by Carnine, Silbert, & Kameenui. ISBN: 0-13-602566-8.

Word Matters, by Pinnell & Fountas, published by Heinemann, (800) 793-2154.

Other Resources

Cambridge Development Laboratory, Inc., 86 West St., Waltham, MA 02451, (800)637- 0047, (781) 890-4640 (Special Education software).

The Neuhaus Education Center (with information about Alphabetic Phonics, teacher and parent workshops), (713) 664-7676; www.neuhaus.org.

The International Dyslexia Association (formerly known as the Orton Dyslexia Society), (410) 296-0232; www.interdys.org.

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Foorman, B.R. (1995). Research on "The Great Debate": Code-Oriented Versus Whole Language Approaches to Reading Instruction. *School Psychology Review,* 24, pp. 376-392.

Foorman, B.R., Francis, D.J., Fletcher, J.M., Schatschneider, C., & Mehta, P. (1998). The Role of Instruction in Learning to Read: Preventing Reading Failure in At-Risk Children. *Journal of Educational Psychology,* 90. pp. 37-55.

Grossen, B. & Carnine, D. (1993). Phonics Instruction: Comparing Research and Practice. *Teaching Exceptional Children,* 25 (2). pp. 22-25.

Heimann, M., Nelson, K.E., Tjus, T., & Gillberg, C. (1995). Increasing Reading and Communication Skills in Children with Autism Through an Interactive Multimedia Computer Program. *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders,* 25 (5), pp. 459-480.

Lovett, M.W., Borden, S.L., DeLuca, T., Lacerenza, L, Benson, N.J., & Brackstone, D. (1994). Treating the Core Deficits of Developmental Dyslexia: Evidence of Transfer of Learning After Phonologically- and Strategy-Based Reading Training Programs. *Developmental Psychology,* 30. pp. 805-822.

Snow, C.E., Burns, M.S., & Griffin, P. (Eds.) (1998). *Preventing Reading Difficulties in Young Children.* Washington D.C.: National Academy Press.

Stahl, S. (1998). Saying the "P" Word: Nine Guidelines for Exemplary Phonics Instruction. In R. L. Allington (ed.), *Teaching Struggling Readers: Articles From the Reading Teacher.* Newark, DE: International Reading Association. pp. 208-216.

Stahl, S.A., Duffy-Hester, A.M., & Stahl, K.A.D. (1998). Everything You Wanted to Know About Phonics (But Were Afraid to Ask). *Reading Research Quarterly,* 33. pp. 338-355.

Chapter 3: Word Identification

What is it?

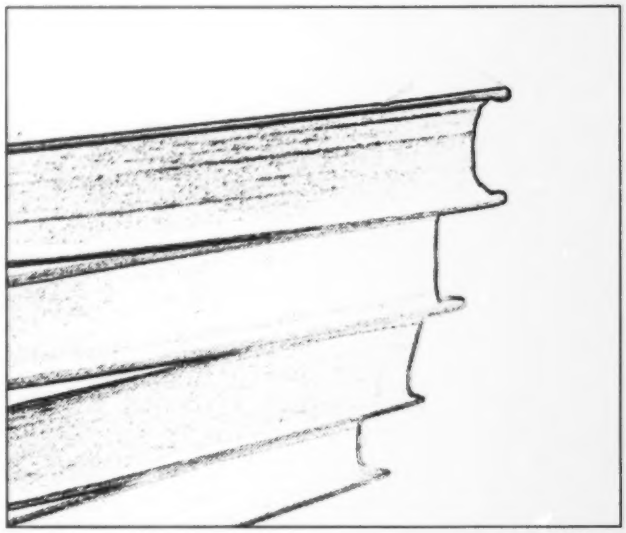
Word identification means recognizing and reading a word. People identify words in different ways. Some words are recognized "at sight." That means that a person just looks at the word and knows it right away. Successful readers read most words in this way.

Many words cannot be sounded out successfully because they do not follow regular rules (like the word "was"). Other words, called "high-frequency words" are so common in English reading that they must be recognized quickly and automatically by effective readers. (Some examples are "went," "she," and "the.") These words are often called "sight words" because they must be read "at sight," without thought or study. It is important that beginning readers and struggling readers learn to identify many high-frequency sight words quickly and easily.

Why is it important?

Students must be able to recognize words to be able to read. The importance of systematic phonics instruction for students with disabilities has been discussed in Chapter 2: **Systematic Phonics Instruction.** "Sounding out" is the first word identification tool most students learn. In order to "sound out," students must be secure in their knowledge and use of letters and sounds, and they must be able to pay attention to the meaning of the story to decide what words make sense as they read. If they have to stop and sound out many words, they will read very slowly, and they will not be able to understand and remember what they read.

Students see thousands of words when they read books and do schoolwork. They must be able to read most words automatically, knowing them "at sight."



People identify words in different ways. Some words are recognized "at sight." That means that a person just looks at the word and knows it right away.

This is especially important for words which the student will encounter often in print. For example, a focus on sight words related to a student's ability to function independently would be an appropriate component of an overall approach to literacy instruction. For older students, a sight word vocabulary of longer, more complicated words should be developed and advanced word identification strategies should be taught.

What can parents do?

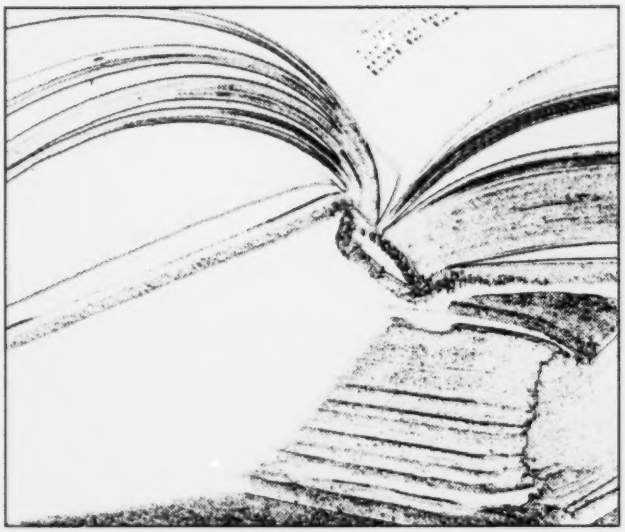
Parents can ask their child's teacher whether word identification instruction and practice is included in their child's reading program. There are several good programs which teach different types of word recognition skills. Parents of students with disabilities should insist that instruction in word identification be included in their child's program if it is needed.

When listening to their child read, parents can help their child know what to do when he/she gets to a "hard part." They can remind the child to start the word and say it slowly (see Chapter 2: **Systematic Phonics Instruction**). They can also remind the child to think about what word would make sense in the sentence. See Chapter 4: **Supported Passage Reading** for more suggestions.

Parents can play games with their children to help them practice quick word identification. *These games are for children who already can read a few words.* Steps for developing a sight-word recognition game to play with your child are described here.

STEP ONE:

- Ask your child's teacher for a list of common "sight words" or "high-frequency words." One common list is called the Dolch Words List. *The Reading Teacher's Book of Lists* (see Resources, below), has a list of "Instant Words." If your child is learning specific vocabulary words, ask the teacher for a list of words he/she is learning in school.



Focus on teaching the words that are most important and useful for the student, such as words they often miscall when reading or functionally important words.

STEP TWO:

- Write 10-15 of the words on note cards. Try to include words your child knows, words your child knows but has to think about, and words your child does not know. For children who know very few words, start with only 5 or 6 words on cards, and include the child's name. Students with more severe reading difficulties may need to study only 2 or 3 words at a time.

STEP THREE:

- Have your child read the words on the cards. Show your child a word. If he/she cannot read the word right away, wait five seconds and then say the word. Have your child repeat the word correctly. If the child has difficulties, take some of the words out of the deck and practice the remaining words until they are known.

STEP FOUR:

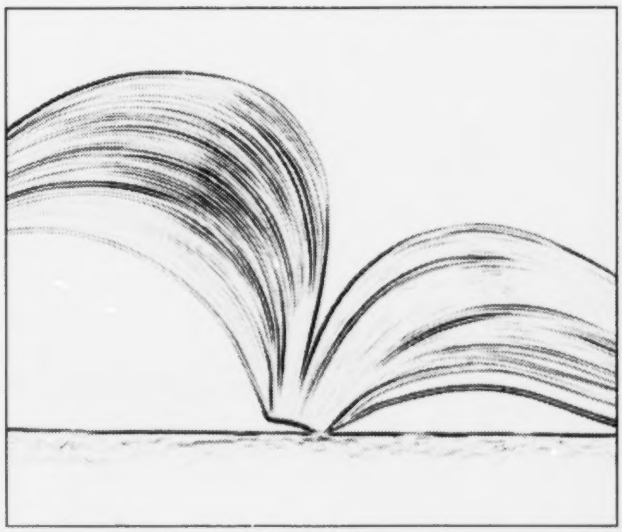
- Play a game called "My Pile Your Pile." Have your child try to read each word quickly. If the child reads the word correctly, put it on the child's pile. If he misses the word, put it on your pile. When the game is over, count to see who has the most cards. Then teach and review the words the child missed and play again.

STEP FIVE:

- As the child becomes able to read all of the words on the note cards, make new cards and add them to the deck. Add no more than 5 new words at a time. For some students, add only 1 word at a time.[1]

What can teachers do?

- Teachers can teach some high-frequency sight words directly to students, and have students practice reading and writing them. Lists of words should be kept short enough and simple enough to ensure the student's success. Focus on teaching the words which are most important and useful for the student to recognize, such as very common words which they miscall while they are reading or functionally



important words. Having students repeatedly write words while saying the words can help them remember the words.

- Teachers can post lists of high-frequency words on the walls of their classrooms. These "word walls" can be practiced by students reading together. Students can also look at the words when they are writing to be sure that they are spelling these words correctly.

- Teachers can directly teach important core vocabulary words for subject areas such as math and science before they ask students to read the textbook or materials for these subjects.

- For older students, teachers can teach structural analysis. That means breaking longer words into parts such as roots, prefixes, and suffixes and using those parts to pronounce words and understand their meanings. Training is available for teachers from the University of Kansas on a *Word Identification Strategy* based on this idea. It is part of their *Learning Strategies Curriculum* (see Resources).

1. **Editor's Note:** Children who are unable to speak can play by matching the words to pictures or to the same word on another card.

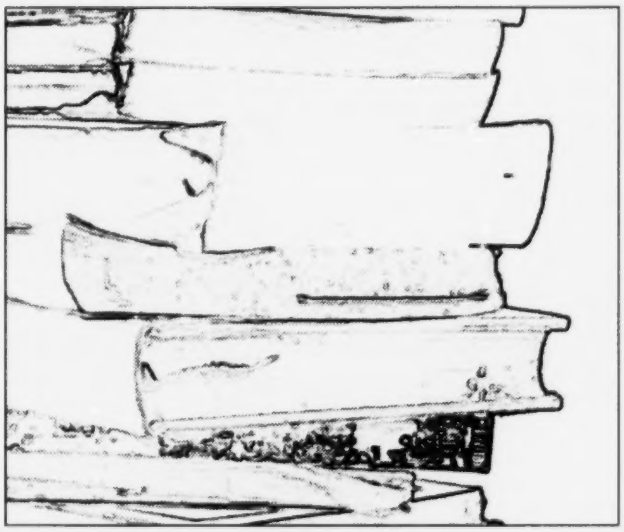
- Some computer programs provide excellent practice in sight word reading.

- Some students learn lists of words which are common in directions for simple meal preparation. An excellent list of these words is provided in the article by Schloss and others, listed in the References section.

- Students may be taught to read signs and labels, such as road signs and medicine labels, schedules such as the *T.V. Guide* or bus schedules, maps, advertisements, directions for the use of tools or equipment, job applications, and many other items important in day-to-day living.

- Some students may learn to recognize important words in a specific area of interest or skill. For example, a student who is learning to work on word projects in a woodshop may learn to read words such as "jigsaw," "sandpaper," and "flammable." The Edmark Company produces computer software designed to teach important functional vocabulary words, and an updated list of essential survival words is found in the Davis & McDaniel article in the *Reading Teacher* (see Resources).

- Still other students may be taught to recognize pictures or symbols instead of, or along with, words. They may learn to recognize logos such as the McDonald's arches or pictures associated with a certain kind of breakfast cereal or soft drink. Store coupons have been used to teach product recognition in preparation for independent grocery shopping. Some books written specifically for persons with mental retardation, for example, combine pictures with simple words to give directions for cooking and daily life skills. Students have also been taught to "write" by typing picture symbols into a



specially designed computer. The Attainment Company, listed in the Resources section, sells many books and computer materials which combine pictures with important vocabulary words for various life skills.

- Several other methods have been effective for teaching sight word reading. In one method, the teacher shows the student a flash card with the word on it, waits four or five seconds, then says the word. After some practice, the student can say the word with the teacher, then without the teacher's help. In other methods, pictures are presented along with the words. These pictures are gradually faded out, and the student is able to read the words without the picture cues. In some approaches, the student is taught to pick out the word being taught from other words on the same page. At first, the other words look very different from the one being taught. Gradually, the student learns to pick out the word from other words which look more similar to it. *The Edmark Reading Program* and the computer software that goes along with it (see Resources) have been effective in teaching useful sight words to many students with mental retardation, for example.

Resources

NOTE: These resources may be helpful to teachers and parents. They are listed here merely as options. The authors of this paper do not recommend any particular program, materials, or test.

Edmark Reading Program and Edmark Functional Word Series (Print and Software) available from PCI Educational Publishing, (800) 594-4263; www.pcicatalog.com , and from Pro-Ed, (800) 897-3202; www.proedinc.com.

Essential Sight Words Program, available from PCI Educational Publishing, (800) 594-4263; www.pcicatalog.com.

An Essential Vocabulary: An Update. In *The Reading Teacher,* vol 52, No. 3, November 1998, pp. 308-309.

Mayer-Johnson Picture Symbols. Published by PCI, (800) 594-4263.

The Reading Teacher's Book of Lists, by Fry, Kress, & Fountoukidis (1993). New York: Center for Applied Research in Education. ISBN 0-13-762014-4. (Contains lists of "Instant Words," lists of prefixes and suffixes and their meanings, key vocabulary words for different subjects for the middle school and high school student, and other useful information.)

Strategies Intervention Model (Word Identification Strategy), training and information available from the University of Kansas, Center for Research on Learning, 3061Dole Center, Lawrence, KS 66045.

Word Masters by Pinnell & Fountas, published by Heinemann, (800) 793-2154.

Words That Work: A Life Skills Vocabulary Program and Survival Vocabulary Words and Stories: Learning Survival Words in Context. Distributed by PCI, (800) 594-4263.

Companies with Materials for Word Reading and Communication Instruction for Students with Disabilities (Call for Catalogs)

Academic Communication Associates (ask for Special Education catalog): (760) 758-9593; www.acadcom.com.

Attainment Company: (800) 327-4269

Cambridge Development Laboratory (software): (800) 637-0047; (781) 890-4640.

Communication Aids for Children and Adults: (414) 352-5678.

Flaghouse: (800) 793-7900.

Kaplan: (800) 334-2014; www.Kaplanco.com.

PCI: (800) 594-4263.

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Browder, D.M. & Snell, M. E. (1993). Functional Academics. In M.E. Snell (Ed.) *Instruction of Students with Severe Disabilities* (4th ed.) (pp. 442-479). New York: Merrill.

Browder, D.M. & Xin, Y.P. (1998). A Meta-Analysis and Review of Sight Word Research and Its Implications for Teaching Functional Reading to Individuals with Moderate and Severe Disabilities. *Journal of Special Education,* 32, pp. 130-153.

Carnine, D.W., Silbert, J., & Kameenui, E.J. (1997). *Direct Instruction Reading.* Columbus, OH: Merrill.

Clay, M.M. (1993). Reading Recovery: *A Guidebook for Teachers in Training.* Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

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Cunningham, P. M. (1996). *Phonics They Use: Words for Reading and Writing* (2nd ed.). New York: Harper Collins.

Schloss, P.J., Alexander, N., Hornig, E., Parker, K., & Wright, B. (1993). Teaching Meal Preparation Vocabulary and Procedures to Individuals with Mental Retardation. *Teaching Exceptional Children,* 25 (3), pp. 7-12.

Thomas, G.E. (1996). *Teaching Students with Mental Retardation.* Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Merrill.

Chapter 4: Supported Passage Reading

What is it?

Passage reading simply means reading actual text (stories, books, or articles). Students with disabilities must be given the opportunity to practice their reading skills by *actually reading*. In supported passage reading, an adult or other person is present to assist the student, as needed.

Every day, students should read two kinds of text:

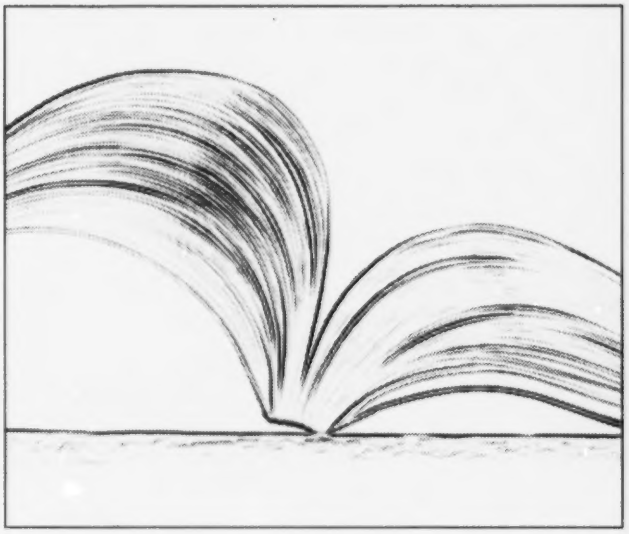
1) **Stories or articles they can read comfortably by themselves, including those they have read before.** This type of reading can be done silently or orally (out loud), depending on the age and skill level of the student. Students who are in the early stages of reading instruction benefit from reading orally, and teachers can hear errors and give the student feedback during oral reading.

2) **Stories or articles they can read with the help of a more capable reader working beside them.** This keeps the students from practicing their mistakes and forming bad habits. The second type of reading should always be done orally. Reading actual text with the support of an adult or a more advanced student or tutor can help struggling readers improve.

NOTE: Students should spend at least 30-45 minutes per day *actually reading* (besides time spent doing worksheets or learning *about* reading).

Why is it important?

Students with disabilities need to be taught many separate skills—how to sound out words, how to identify words quickly, and how to understand what they read. These are discussed in other sections of this Resource Booklet. Learning these skills is similar to a football player learning how to tackle, pass, or run. Passage reading gives the student the chance to practice all these skills and to understand how they work together in good reading, just as football players need to actually practice playing the game. Just as a football team needs the support of a coach, a student who is learning to read well needs the support of an adult while he/she practices reading. The adult is the struggling reader's coach.



What can parents and teachers do?

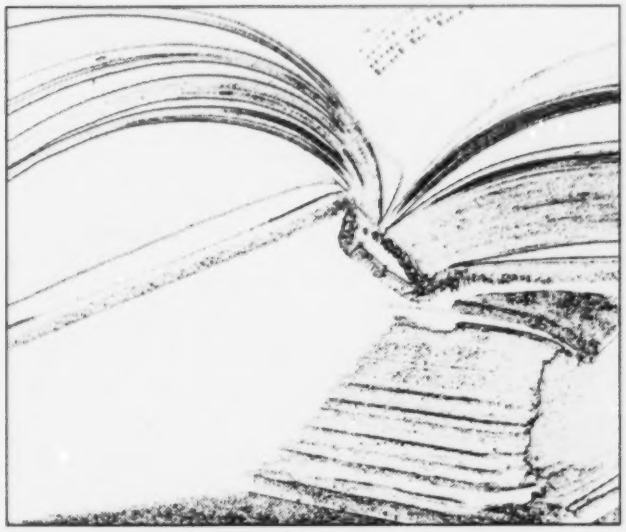
Parents and teachers can help students with disabilities increase their reading ability using simple methods to support the students' oral (out loud) reading of real stories or articles.

The first and most important rule about passage reading is that the reading material *must* be at an appropriate level of difficulty for the student. If the book or story being read is too difficult, students will become frustrated and see themselves as failures. One quick way to find out if the story is too hard for a student is to count out 100 words in the story or passage and have the student read that section. Count the number of mistakes. If the student makes 10 or more mistakes in 100 words (including words left out or added and words you have to give them), the story is too hard. Choose an easier story. Even without counting words, a parent, teacher, or tutor can often tell when the reading material is too difficult. If the student is making many mistakes while reading, having to work very hard to struggle through the story, and/or is becoming frustrated, the student should be given easier reading material for supported passage reading practice.

Many reading methods used by special educators provide stories that are carefully designed to apply the skills the student has already learned. These stories contain only words that the student can decode (sound out or figure out) successfully. Examples of these reading methods include *Reading Mastery, Read Well, and Corrective Reading,* described in Chapter 2: **Systematic Phonics Instruction**.

Remember: Supported Passage Reading should be a pleasant experience for the student. Students should feel successful and enjoy reading with you. Be patient, and stop the activity if you or the student become frustrated.

These passage reading activities have been shown to be effective in helping students with disabilities improve their reading:



***The first and most important rule* about passage reading is that the reading material *must* be at an appropriate level of difficulty for the student.**

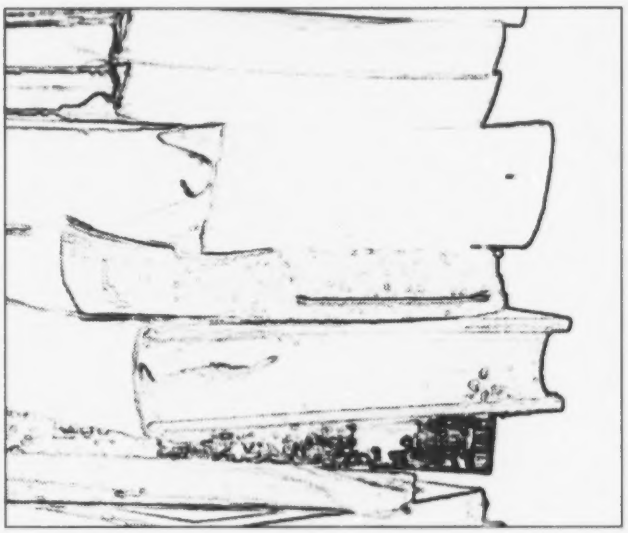
- **Repeated Reading Together.** Read the story, or part of the story quietly along with the student. Read slowly enough so that the student can keep up with you. Practice the same story several times together. See Chapter 5: **Fluent Reading** for further description of this method.

- **Reading with Word Practice.** Have the student read until he or she makes 5-15 mistakes. Write down the missed words while the student is reading. After 5-15 mistakes, stop the read-

ing at the end of the next sentence or paragraph. Write the words the student missed on note cards. Teach these words and have the student practice until the words are known and can be said quickly. Then have the student read the same part of the story again. If the student misses one of the words you practiced, simply say the word quietly and quickly as the reading progresses.

- **Reading with Prompting to Solve New Words.** Prompting means giving hints. If a student "gets stuck" on a word while he or she is reading, decide whether it is a word the child *could* sound out. If it is, you can ask the child to start the word and say it slowly (see Chapter 2: **Systematic Phonics Instruction**). You can also remind the child to think about what word would make sense in the story. Thinking about what the story is about often makes it easier to read difficult words. Another thing students can try when they come to a difficult word is to look for a pattern (or patterns) in the word that they know. For example, in the word "army," students may recognize the "a-r" pattern, which is like the word "are." Students trying to read the word "awesome," may see the "a-w" pattern which is found in the word "saw," and the "s-o-m-e" of the word "some." Parents and teachers can help the child discover patterns by asking, "What do you know in that word that could help you?"

- **Teaching Students to Correct Their Own Reading Errors.** It is very important that students recognize when they have made a mistake in their reading and try to correct their own errors. Some students tend to read a story almost like a machine, as if the story were just



a group of words to be said out loud. They need to be reminded that everything they read must make sense and sound right. If they read something that does not make sense or does not sound right, they need to re-read and try to find and correct their error(s). When a student makes a mistake, parents and teachers can wait a few seconds before correcting the error to give the student time to correct it themselves. If the student makes a mistake in reading and does not correct it, the parent or teacher can say something like, "Try that again, and make it make sense," or, "Try that again, and make it sound right." These reminders must be given in a pleasant, calm voice. If students cannot find their mistakes, point them out and supply the correct word. Have the student read the sentence again correctly and continue the reading.

- **Reading with Expression.** Many struggling readers read in a flat, choppy "reading voice," and many ignore punctuation marks like periods when they read. They need to learn to read with expression, making the reading

sound more like natural speech. Parents and teachers can demonstrate expressive reading for students. This includes demonstrating how to read punctuation marks—stopping at periods, pausing at commas, making questions sound like questions, and using an appropriate tone of voice for direct quotations. Read a sentence, or a few sentences, with expression. Then ask the student to read it in the same way. After a student can do this successfully, ask him or her to read the next few sentences. If the student does not read with expression, demonstrate again, and have them repeat after you or read along with you. Some students have very strong habits of reading with poor expression. It can take months of practice to break these habits.

- **Read for Meaning.** It is important that the child reads to find out what the story is about, not just to say the words. See Chapter 6: **Reading Comprehension** for ways to help students understand and remember what they read.

- **Classwide Peer Tutoring.** Students with disabilities have increased their reading and social skills through classwide peer tutoring. In one type of peer tutoring, students are put in pairs to work together on reading tasks. One student (the learner) reads to the other one (the tutor), while the tutor scores points on a sheet for every sentence that is read correctly. Tutors also give learners positive feedback as they read. After the reading is done, the tutor asks the learner questions for three minutes. Then the two students switch roles and repeat the procedure.

Resources

Guided Reading (especially the chapter on "Teaching for Strategies," pp. 149-162), by Irene C. Fountas & Gay Su Pinnell, published by Heinemann, 361 Hanover Street, Portsmouth, NH 03801-3912; ISBN 0-435-08863-7.

How to Tutor in Reading: Guidelines and Competencies, by Richard Parker, Jan E. Hasbrouck, and Carolyn A. Denton (1998), Texas A&M University, Department of Educational Psychology, Mail Stop 4225, College Station, TX 77840-4225. (409) 845-7505.

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Grossen, B. & Carnine, D. (1993). Phonics Instruction: Comparing Research and Practice. *Teaching Exceptional Children,* 25 (2), pp. 22-25.

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Parker, R. & Hasbrouck, J.E. (1998) How to Tutor in Reading: Guidelines and Competencies. College Station, TX: Texas A&M University, Center for Disabled and At-Risk Children and Youth (DARCY).

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Chapter 5: Fluent Reading

What is it?

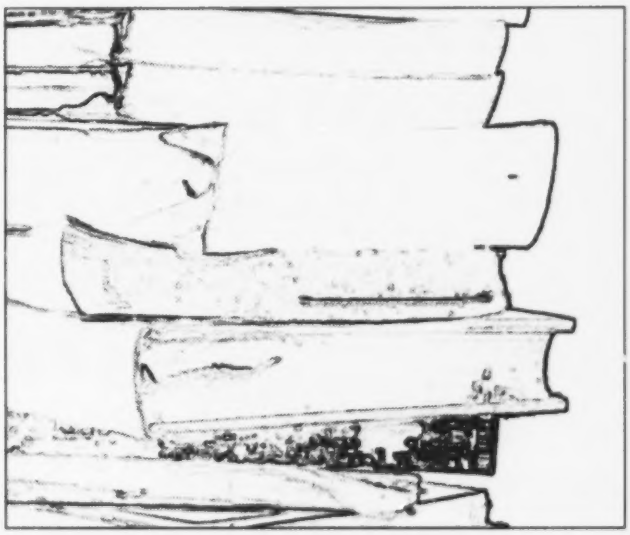
To read fluently means to read smoothly and quickly, recognizing words automatically. Fluent readers read groups of words rather than one word at a time. They pay attention to punctuation marks such as commas and periods when they read. Their reading sounds very much like natural speech.

Think about listening to a poor reader read out loud. Usually, their reading is choppy. They stop and struggle with words, and they read slowly and with great effort. They probably do not read with expression in their voices, and they may ignore punctuation marks like periods, plodding on through one word after another. This is not fluent reading. Unfortunately, many students with disabilities read in this way.

Why is it important?

The purpose of reading is to understand what is being read. Research has shown that people who read fluently are much more likely to understand, or comprehend, what they read. When good readers read a passage, they do not have to think about saying each word correctly. They read the words *automatically*. Their brains are free to concentrate on the meaning of the passage.

Poor readers struggling through the passage word-by-word must pay a lot of attention to saying the words correctly. Since it is impossible to think about two things at one time—and struggling readers have to think about reading each word they see—these readers cannot pay attention to the meaning of the passage. Fluent reading is important because it is a key to understanding what is being read.



The purpose of reading is to understand what is being read. Research has shown that people who read fluently are much more likely to understand, or comprehend, what they read.

What can parents and teachers do?

First, parents and teachers can assess (or test) the oral reading fluency of a student. It is very important that the passages (or stories) which are used in fluent reading practice are at just the right level of

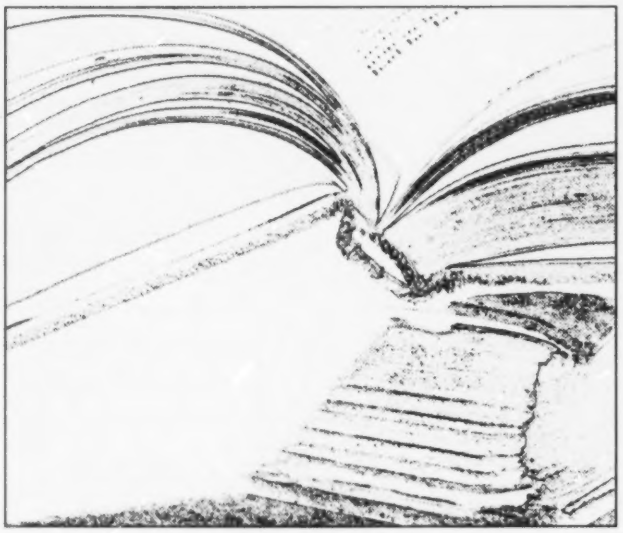
difficulty for the student. If the material is too hard, the student will only become frustrated.

- One quick way to find out if the story is too hard for a student is to count out 100 words in the story or passage and have the student read that section. Then, count the number of mistakes, if any. If there are 10 or more mistakes in 100 words (including words left out or added and words you have to supply), the story is too hard. Choose an easier story for fluency training.

- To find out how many words a student reads correctly per minute, time the student while he or she reads material which is at the appropriate level (not too hard, not too easy) for one minute. Count the number of words they read in the one-minute period. Keep track of how many mistakes are made, and subtract that number from the total number of words read. The resulting number is the words read correctly per minute.

- As students get older, they should read more and more fluently. By the end of first grade, students should be able to read about 60 words correctly in one minute. By the end of second grade, that should increase to about 94 correct words per minute. At the end of third grade, average readers can read 114 words correctly in one minute. That number increases to 118 words at the end of fourth grade and to 128 words at the end of fifth grade. Upper grade students should read between 125 and 150 words correctly in one minute.

Three methods have been shown to be effective in increasing oral reading fluency: **(1) modeling,**

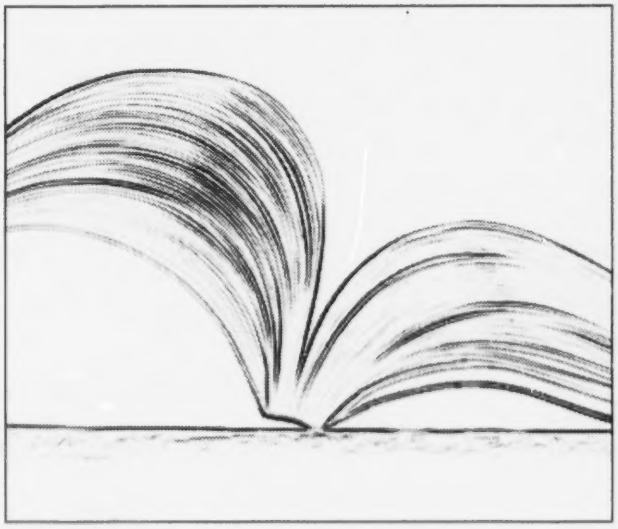


When good readers read a passage, they do not have to think about saying each word correctly. They read the words *automatically.* Their brains are free to concentrate on the meaning of the passage.

(2) repeated reading, and (3) **goal setting and progress monitoring.** Parents and teachers can use any one of these methods, or a combination of two or three of them, to help students with disabilities learn to read more fluently.

- **Modeling.** Modeling means reading out loud along with a struggling reader. It can be done by a parent, a teacher, a volunteer, a tutor, or another student who is already a fluent reader. The person doing the modeling simply reads along quietly with the struggling reader, pulling them along with their voices when they get "stuck." It is very important for the person doing the modeling to read slowly enough so that the struggling reader can keep up and read along, but just a little faster than the reader could read on his or her own. The modeling should be done in a smooth way, reading groups of words rather than one word at a time. In one type of modeling, the teacher or parent sits behind and slightly to the side of the reader and reads along quietly and slowly in the struggling reader's ear. Tape recordings can supply modeling, but it is important that the person on the recording reads slowly enough for the struggling reader to keep up. Most books-on-tape available in stores are too fast. Tapes available with the *Read Naturally* program (see Resources) are specifically designed to be appropriate for students to read along with. Some computer programs can provide modeling as students read along with them.

- **Repeated Reading.** One well-known way to help struggling readers read more fluently is to have them read the same short, meaningful story or passage several times out loud. This is very much like practicing a hard song on a musical instrument or practicing hitting baseballs until it gets easier and smoother. Choose a story or part of a story which is about 100-200 words long. Have the student read it again and again until it can be read smoothly and quickly.



It can help a great deal to add modeling (read along with the student) for the first two or three times the student reads the passage. Have the student spend several minutes every day doing repeated reading.

- **Goal Setting and Progress Monitoring.** In fluency training, this means setting a fluency goal with students and having them practice repeated reading until they can meet that goal. It also means keeping track of how quickly students are able to read each passage they practice every day. For example, if a student can read only 60 words correctly in one minute, the goal could be 90 correct words per minute. Students should practice a new story until they can read it that quickly, and then write down their speed before and after they practice the story each day. Speeds should go up as the student practices, helping struggling readers see that they are making progress. Monitoring their progress can make students want to practice reading and help them feel better about their reading ability.

- **Combination Methods.** The best method for increasing fluent reading is to combine modeling, repeated reading, and goal setting and progress monitoring. Students practice reading every day. They time themselves reading a new story, and they write down that time. They read the new story with modeling 2 or 3 times. Then they practice it more on their own, reading it several times. They time themselves again, and see whether they have met their goal speed. If they have met their goal, they write down their new reading speed. If not, they keep practicing. A commercial program which combines these methods is Read Naturally, described in the Resources.

Resources

NOTE: These resources may be helpful to teachers and parents. They are listed here merely as options. The authors of this paper do not recommend any particular program, materials, or test.

Read Naturally. 2329 Kressin Ave., St. Paul, Minnesota 55120, (800) 788-4085. readnat@aol.com.

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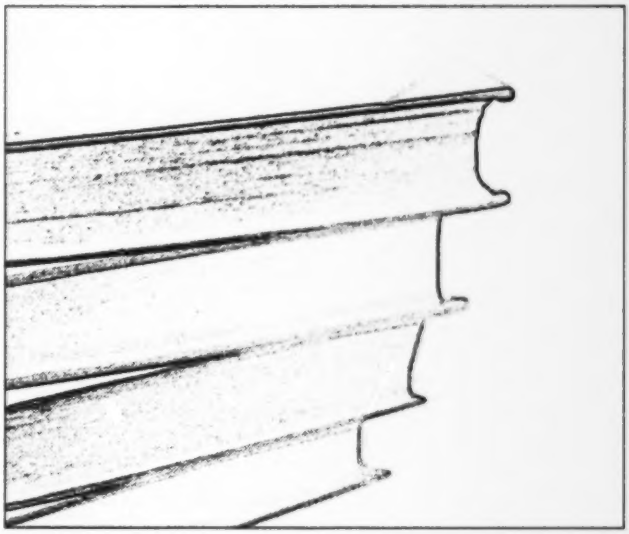
Chapter 6: Reading Comprehension

What is it and why is it important?

Reading comprehension means understanding and remembering what is read. It is the purpose of reading. We read to find out what the author of a book, story, or article is telling us. Whether we are reading a comic book, a good novel, a television schedule, a newspaper, or a job application, we read to understand what the words on the paper mean. If students with disabilities cannot comprehend or understand and remember what they are reading, they will not be able to get information they need from books or enjoy good stories.



Reading comprehension means understanding and remembering what is read. It is the purpose of reading. We read to find out what the author of a book, story, or article is telling us.

Reading comprehension is closely linked to listening comprehension, a person's ability to understand and remember what they hear. A student who has problems producing and understanding spoken language might also have problems understanding written language. Students with cognitive impairments (difficulties with thinking and reasoning) often can be expected to have serious problems understanding what they read or what is read to them.

There are several different kinds of comprehension. The simplest is literal comprehension. That means simply remembering what is read and being able to repeat it. If you read "John went to Texas," and the teacher asked, "Where did John go?", you would use literal comprehension to answer "Texas."

Other comprehension skills include sequencing, which means putting events in order, and summarizing, which means telling the main ideas of a passage. Comprehension also includes inference, which means using clues in the passage to figure out answers to questions. The answers to inference questions are not directly stated in the passage (as in the "John" example above). Students must think, reason, and draw conclusions about what is read.

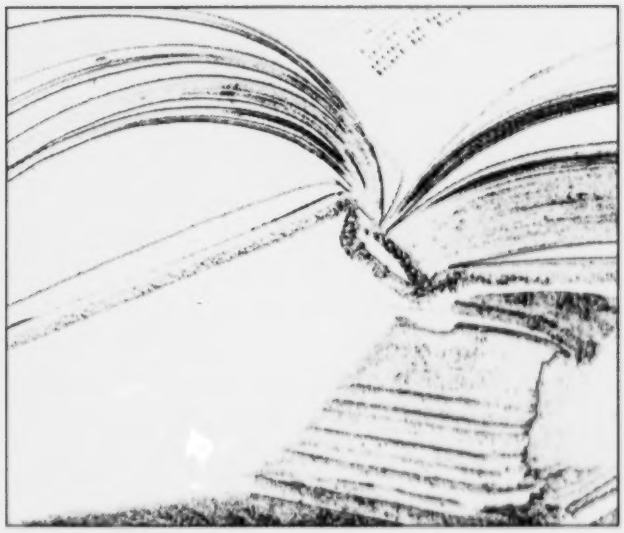
NOTE: Chapters 2 and 3, **Systematic Phonics Instruction** and **Word Identification**, respectively,

discuss the importance of students' being able to quickly recognize and read words. Chapter 5: **Fluent Reading** stresses that students who read more quickly and smoothly are more likely to understand and remember what they read. Many students have problems with reading comprehension because they cannot figure out words quickly enough. Please see chapters on **Systematic Phonics Instruction, Word Identification,** and **Fluent Reading** for suggestions about helping students improve their reading comprehension. Also, see Chapter 7: **Early Intervention in Reading** for information about language development programs which may help students who have problems expressing themselves in or understanding spoken language.

What can parents do?

Some students have problems remembering and understanding what they read even when reading the words is easy, or when someone else reads to them. The following list describes some strategies parents can use to help:

- Read to your child every day, for at least 20-30 minutes. Before reading, talk with your child about the subject of the story or passage you are going to read. Have your child predict what the passage will be about, tell what they already know about the topic, and/or tell things they would like to find out from the reading. Then read one or two paragraphs. Stop and ask what the paragraphs were about or talk about them together. It may help to ask specific questions about the paragraphs you read. If discussing what was read is difficult for your child, here are some things you can try:
  1. *Choose a simpler story or passage, or one that deals with a subject your child knows a lot about. For example, if your child loves baseball and knows a lot about the game, find a story or passage about baseball.*



Reading comprehension is closely linked to listening comprehension, a person's ability to understand and remember what they hear.

  2. *Read less before you stop and ask your child to tell about the passage. Read two sentences instead of two paragraphs.*

- Use these same activities, only have your child read to you this time (for at least 20-30 minutes each day). Be sure that the passage is not too difficult. See Chapter 5: **Fluent Reading** for instructions on how to find out whether a passage is on the right level, or use your own judgment. Students who struggle a great deal to

read the words in the passage will probably not be able to understand and remember what they read.

- One trick which may help children remember what was read to them or what they read themselves is to ask them to make mental pictures during the reading. They can imagine everything that is happening in the story or passage, just as though they are seeing it on television.

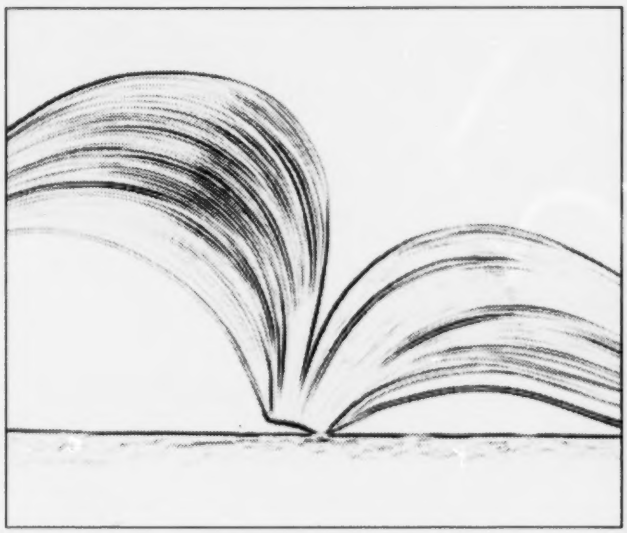
- Another helpful exercise is to have children ask questions about the story or passage before reading (what they want to find out) and during reading, stopping every paragraph or so to talk about answers they have found to earlier questions and to ask more questions.

- After reading the entire story or passage, have your child tell in one or two sentences the most important main ideas of the reading. They can also tell the most interesting things they learned from the reading and/or their favorite parts of a story.

What can teachers do?

Teachers can do all of the things described above for parents. They can also include the following approaches in their reading instruction:

- **Direct Instruction in Comprehension Skills.** Several Direct Instruction programs teach comprehension skills in a systematic and organized way. This type of approach is especially important for students with disabilities who have reading difficulties. For example, SRA's Corrective Reading Program has components which are specifically designed for students in Grades 4-8 who have difficulty



with comprehension. The program's authors suggest that the program is appropriate for students who speak and understand English, and who have learning, emotional, or perceptual disabilities or other disabilities with reading comprehension learning needs. The program begins with instruction in basic thinking and language comprehension skills and progresses through more advanced comprehension and vocabulary skills.

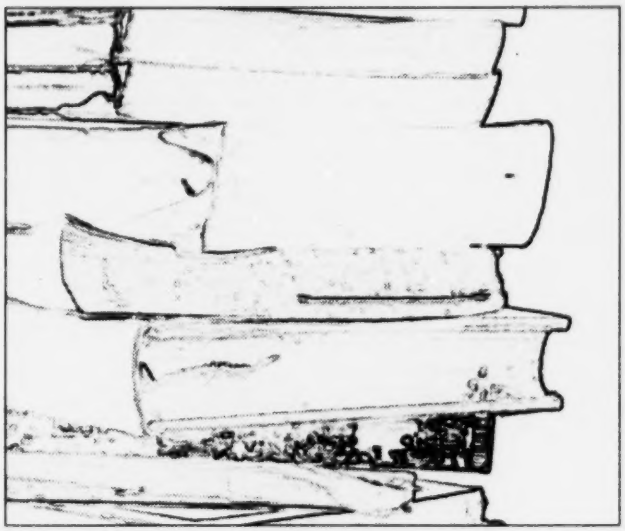
- **Comprehension Strategy Instruction.** Especially for students in middle school, high school, and college, instruction and training in the use of comprehension strategies has been shown to be effective in increasing reading comprehension. A strategy is a planned action that students take when they encounter a problem. Strategy instruction emphasizes teaching students how to learn, including how to approach and work through problems. Some examples of effective comprehension strategies include:
  - summarizing strategies – step-by-step procedures for writing effective summaries of what is read,

- mental imagery strategies – imagining, or making mental pictures of what is read,
- questioning strategies – asking a variety of questions about what they are reading, and learning how to locate answers to questions,
- reciprocal teaching strategies – students studying and learning from text, and
- story grammar strategies – anticipating common parts of a story, such as characters, problem, and solution.

The Strategies Intervention Model from the University of Kansas (see Resources) is a well-researched method of strategy instruction. Trainers who have attended special sessions at the University of Kansas contract with school districts to provide training to teachers.

- **Modeling Mental Processes.** An approach closely related to strategy instruction (and included in most strategy instruction) is modeling mental processes. The teacher "thinks out loud" to show students effective mental processes which can be used during reading. For example, the teacher may say, "I want to show you what I think about when I come to a word I don't know," or "When I read I ask myself whether what I am reading is making sense. Let me show you what I might be thinking about as I am reading this story."

- **Academic Intervention Approach.** Teachers can help students understand subject areas (like science or social studies) by giving them extra organizational tools. Some excellent tools for this purpose are described in a section of the book *Interventions: Collaborative Planning for Students At Risk,* listed in the Resources. For example, a graphic organizer is a chart or diagram of the important concepts in a lesson or reading passage. On the chart are blank spaces for the student to fill in during or after reading. Another academic intervention often useful for students with disabilities is preteaching important vocabulary words before a lesson or reading assignment is given. Teachers can also highlight students' textbooks to help the students identify the most important information in the passage. Highlighter tape can be used and then removed without damage to books.



Note for Second-Language Learners

Students who have a limited understanding of English can be expected to have difficulty understanding passages written in English. Comprehension instruction should begin in these students' native language. Adults should read to the students in their native languages and talk about what is being read, as described in **What can parents do?** It is essential to prepare students with limited English proficiency for

reading in English. Parents and teachers should introduce the story or passage by talking about what the reading will be about and by teaching any vocabulary words that could present problems for the reader.

Instruction in some strategies has increased reading comprehension among second-language learners (especially Spanish-speaking students) on the secondary level. Less successful bilingual Spanish readers have been taught to use "tricks" that more successful readers use. Successful bilingual readers understand the ways that reading and writing in their two languages are alike. Less successful readers see their two languages as separate and unrelated. For example, when more successful Spanish bilingual readers come to an English word they do not know, they may think of a similar Spanish word to help them figure out the English word. When they read in English, they often *think about* what they are reading in both Spanish and English.

Spanish-speaking bilingual readers have been taught to successfully use strategies like those described above in **What can teachers do?** during English reading. When they are taught to ask questions while reading, to think about the meanings of unknown words, use what they know to understand difficult parts, and make visual pictures in their minds, they may become more motivated to read in English and read more successfully.

Resources

NOTE: These resources may be helpful to teachers and parents. They are listed here merely as options. The authors of this paper do not recommend any particular program, materials, or test.

Direct Instruction Materials:

Corrective Reading, by Engelmann, Haddox, Hanner, & Osborn, published by SRA, 220 East Danieldale Rd., DeSoto, TX 75115-2490, (800) 843-8855.

Reading Mastery, by Engelmann & Bruner, published by SRA, 220 East Danieldale Rd., DeSoto, TX 75115-2490, (800) 843-8855.

Strategy Instruction Materials and Tutoring: Lindamood-Bell Learning Processes, (800)233-1819. http://www.lblp.com

Strategies Intervention Model, training and information available from the University of Kansas, Center for Research on Learning, 3061 Dole Center, Lawrence, KS 66045.

Academic Intervention Materials:

Interventions: Collaborative Planning for Students At Risk, by Sprick, Sprick, & Garrison, Published by Sopris West, 1140 Boston Ave., Longmont, CO, 80501, (303) 651-2829.

Teaching Strategies, Inc., P.O. Box 50550, Eugene, OR 97405, (800) 323-8819. (Workshops, publications, and inservice on academic and behavioral interventions.)

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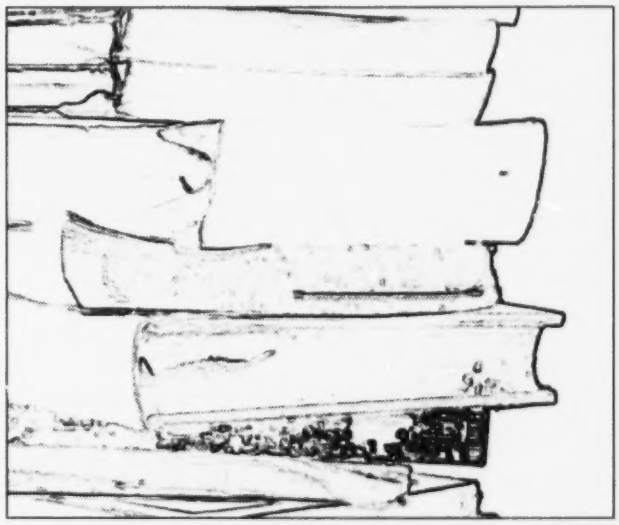
Chapter 7: Early Intervention in Reading

What is it?

Early intervention in reading means providing a special program to help young children improve their reading and writing skills before they fall behind the other students in their classes. Early intervention in reading is usually provided in Kindergarten or Grade 1 to students who show signs of having problems learning to read. These programs are normally provided to students in small groups or individually. It is important to note that this extra reading instruction and practice is provided in addition to the child's regular reading class. Students who are at-risk or who have disabilities need extra reading instruction time, not less. Early intervention programs are most effective if they are provided daily for at least 20 to 30 minutes.

There are several different types of early intervention in reading programs. One approach is to provide daily phonological awareness training to students in small groups or individually (See Chapter 1: **Phonological Awareness.**). Other approaches are described in commercially published reading programs that teachers can use in the classroom or resource room. Special programs, such as Reading Recovery, are taught by specially-trained teachers in a separate place. Some students may need special programs in language development. These language-development programs are not for second-language learners, but for children who have problems expressing themselves well in their native language.

Some of these programs may remove the child from the regular education program to receive reading instruction. Parents and teachers should make every effort to provide reading instruction within the regular classroom setting, consistent with the student's individual needs. Early intervention reading programs should be temporary, short-term interventions, not permanent placements. They should not take the place of the child's regular reading instruction, but should supplement it with additional intensive, individualized instruction designed to help the child overcome difficulties with early reading skills.



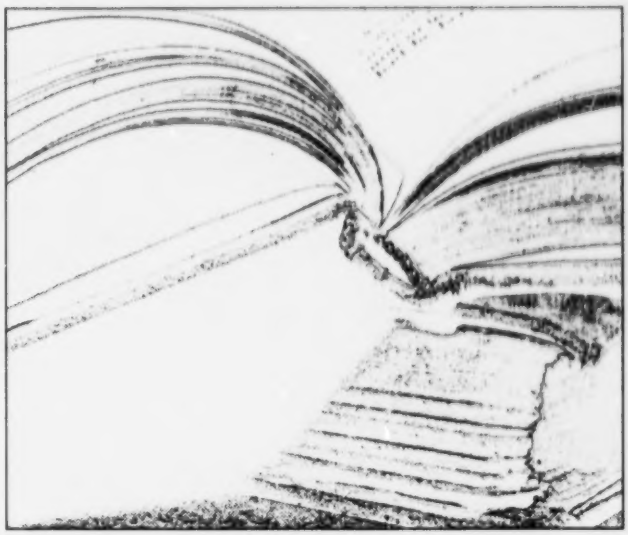
Early intervention in reading may prevent the mislabeling of some children as having learning disabilities.

Why is it important?

Early intervention in reading may prevent the mislabeling of some children as having learning disabilities. Research indicates that if young children are given intensive, high-quality, individualized instruction, they may catch up with other students in their grade and not need to be referred for special education services. If they do not catch up with the other students very early, even students who do not have disabilities will tend to read less, develop a negative attitude toward reading, and become so far behind that they develop signs of reading difficulty. These students may begin to see themselves as failures, and begin to believe that they just can't learn to read. Many reading difficulties experienced by teenagers and adults could have been prevented if there had been adequate instruction in the earliest years of school.

If young children (Kindergarten through Grade 2) are receiving special education services, they can still benefit from *extra* time devoted to quality reading instruction. The sooner special remediation begins, the more likely the student can be helped. When students get further behind each year, it becomes harder for them to ever catch up to the appropriate reading level for their grade. Even if students with disabilities are provided with excellent early intervention, they may still need long-term help with their reading difficulties.

Early intervention can prevent children from feeling like failures in reading. If the instruction is of good quality, it will be individualized for each child, and each child will be successful. "Individualized" intervention means that the program will teach just what the child needs. It will be at just the right level of difficulty for that child to learn without failure—not too hard, not too easy.



The sooner special remediation begins, the more likely the student can be helped. When students get further behind each year, it becomes harder for them to ever catch up to the appropriate reading level for their grade.

What can parents do?

Parents of young children who are having difficulty learning to read can ask for extra reading instruction to help their children catch up and experience reading success before they develop negative attitudes toward reading. Remember: This is extra instruction

provided *in addition* to the child's regular reading program, which should be provided within the regular education classroom.

What can teachers do?

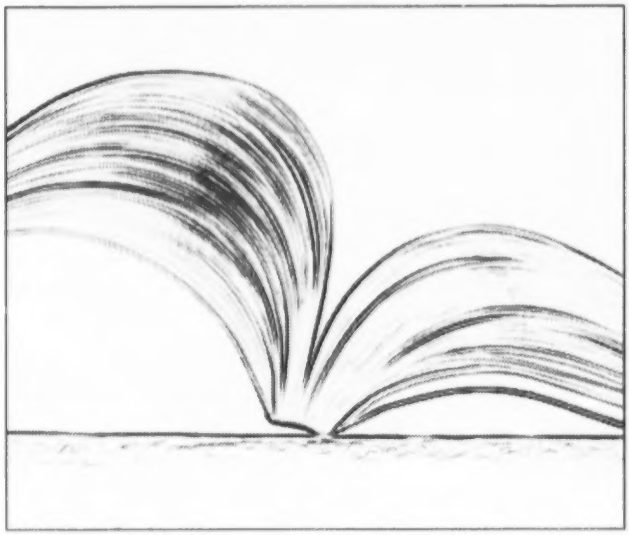
Teachers can provide early reading intervention or can request that reading specialists provide this instruction as part of an additional reading program.

Remember:

- This instruction should be provided *in addition* to the child's regular reading class.
- The intervention must be individualized for the child or group that receives it. It must be at just the right level of difficulty to teach what the child needs and to ensure learning and success.
- The intervention must be of high quality and must keep each child actively engaged in reading or reading-related activities (like phonological awareness or language development) for the entire session. There are some excellent guidelines for quality early intervention programs in the article from the *Reading Teacher* by D.L. Spiegel, listed in References.

Teachers can provide:

- Extra phonological awareness and phonemic awareness training (see Chapter 1: **Phonological Awareness**).
- Direct Instruction in phonological skills and early phonics training using programs such as *Reading Mastery* or *Read Well* (see Resources, below).
- Extra guided reading practice (see Chapter 4: **Supported Passage Reading**).



- Language development programs, such as *Distar Language I and II* (see Resources).
- Other intervention programs (see, for example, "First Grade Teachers Provide Early Reading Intervention in the Classroom," listed in the References section).

Special Note for Second-Language Learners

Early intervention should be provided in the child's native language, if possible. The *Reading Recovery* program is available in some places in Spanish; it is known as *Descubriendo La Lectura*.

Resources

NOTE: These resources may be helpful to teachers and parents. They are listed here merely as options. The authors of this paper do not recommend any particular program, materials, or test.

Programs Provided by the Classroom or Resource Teacher

Distar Language I and Language II, SRA Publishing Co., (800) 772-4543.

Reading Mastery, SRA Publishing Co., (800) 772-4543.

Read Well: Critical Foundations in Primary Reading, by Sprick, Howard, and Fidanque, Sopris West, (800) 547-6747.

Programs Provided by a Reading Specialist

Reading Recovery and Descubriendo La Lectura: For more information, contact The Reading Recovery Council of North America, 1929 Kenny Road, Suite 100, Columbus, Ohio, 43210-1069, (614) 292-7111.

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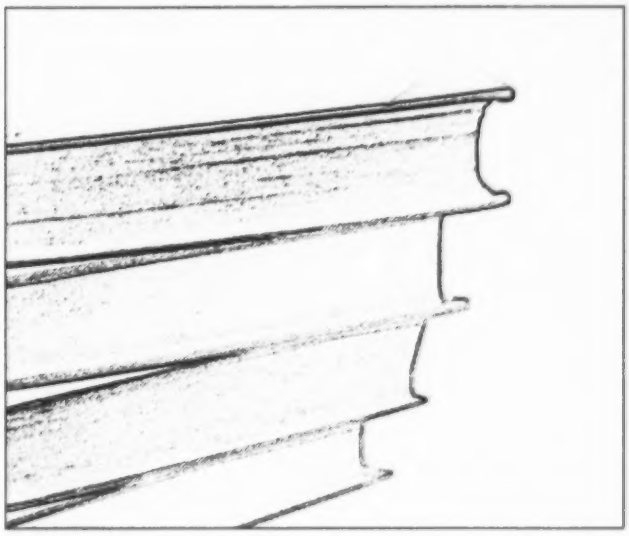
Conclusion

Many students with disabilities can learn to read. Reading can open the door to success, enabling students to live independent lives and to succeed in a variety of careers. This PEER Resource Booklet has outlined some areas of critical concern in reading education for students with disabilities. When parents and teachers have access to the information they need, they can be better equipped to make decisions about students' educational programs.



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